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THATCHED HOUSE NUISANCES

(extract from London's Suburban Gardener and Villa
Companion.

Quoted in Civil Engineers' and Architects' Journal, v.1, p.246, 1838)

"A thatched cottage is an object of admiration with many persons who have not had much experience of country life, and accordingly we find several in the neighborhood of London. Such cottages have, perhaps, the gable end covered with ivy, the chimney tops entwined with Virginian creepers, and the windows overshadowed by roses and jasmines. The ivy forms an excellent harbour for sparrows and other small birds, which build there in quantities in spring and early in summer, and roost there during winter. In June, as soon as the young birds are fledged, all the cats in the neighbourhood are attracted by them, and take up their abode in the roof of the house every night for several weeks, the noise and other annoyances occasioned by which we need only to allude to. We say nothing of the damp produced by the deciduous creepers and the roses, as we have already mentioned that, but we must here notice another evil which is not so obvious, though quite as serious, and this is the numerous insects generated in the decaying thatch, and more especially that loathsome creature, the earwig, which in autumn, whenever the windows are open, comes into the house in quantities, and finds its way into every closet, chink, piece of furniture, and even books and papers.

"All cottages of this kind harboursnails and slugs in the ivy, and spiders under the eaves of the thatched roof, and wherever there are spiders there are also abundance of flies. As there is always a garden attached to such cottages, it is almost certain, if on clayey soil, to abound in snails, slugs, worms, and, if the situation is low, perhaps newts. Some of these from the doors, or, at all events, the back door,

being generally kept open, are quite sure to find their way, not only into the kitchen, but even into the pantry and cellars. Slugs, when very small, will enter a house through a crevice in the window or a crack in the door, find their way to the moist floor of the pantry or the cellar, and remain there for weeks, till they are of such size that they cannot retreat. There are few persons, indeed, who do not experience a feeling of disgust at seeing the slimy traces of a slug in any part of the house, not to speak of finding them in dishes in which food is kept, or even on bread, or at discovering an earwig in their bed or on their linen.

"The kitchen, in low damp cottages of every kind, almost always swarms with beetles and cockroaches, and the pantry with flies; while, from the closeness and want of ventilation in the rooms, it is almost impossible to keep fleas, etc., from the beds. If a large dog be kept in or near the house, as it frequently is, or if a stable or cowhouse be near, the fleas from the dog, the horses, or the cows, which are larger than the common kind, will overspread the carpets, and find their way to the sofas and beds.

"Having lived in cottages of this kind in the neighbourhood of London, we have not stated a single annoyance that we have not ourselves experienced; and we have purposely admitted some. Two of these, offensive smells and rats, are the infallible results of the want of proper water-closets and drainage; but these evils, great as they may seem to be, are much easier to remedy than the others already mentioned, which are, in a great measure, inseparable from this kind of house.

"Two others, the danger of setting fire to a thatched roof, and its liability to be injured by high winds, are sufficiently obvious; but it would hardly occur to any one who had not lived in a house of this description in the neighbourhood of London, that a thatched roof is of all roofs the most expensive, both when first formed, and afterwards to keep in repair. A plumber or a slater to repair a lead or a slate roof may be found everywhere in the suburbs of large towns; but a professional thatcher must be sent for from the interior of the country. For example, the nearest cottage-thatchers to London are in the hundreds of Essex on the east, and in Buckinghamshire on the west."

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COMMENT ON THE JOURNAL (continued from page 42)

periodical on architecture, could be made available in British libraries."

We are flattered by the Review's generous notice, but we believe that a similar or affiliated society in England would not only be desirable, but quite feasible. Although the Review itself does valiant service in cultivating an enlightened interest in architectural history, a British ASAH would doubtless fulfill as useful and welcome a function as here. Until more propitious times return, ASAH membership is available to our English colleagues and libraries. The library of the RIBA already has a complete file of the JOURNAL. For all of us who cut our historical eye-teeth on Blomfield, Bond and Banister-Fletcher, collaboration with their successors would be most enjoyable.

